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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL CONCERNING THE SITUATION IN ABKHAZIA, GEORGIA

I. INTRODUCTION

1. By its resolution 1150 (1998) of 30 January 1998, the Security Council decided to extend the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) for a new period terminating on 31 July 1998 subject to a review by the Council of the mandate of UNOMIG in the event of any changes that might be made in the mandate or in the presence of the peacekeeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In the same resolution, the Council requested me to continue to keep it regularly informed, and to report after three months from the date of the adoption of the resolution on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, including on the operations of UNOMIG, and to provide recommendations in that report on the nature of the United Nations presence. The present report is submitted in pursuance of that request.

II. POLITICAL ASPECTS

2. Sustained efforts to move the Georgian/Abkhaz peace process forward continued to be made during the reporting period by my Special Representative for Georgia, Mr. Liviu Bota, and the Russian Federation in its capacity as facilitator, with the assistance of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the group of Friends of the Secretary-General. Those efforts were negatively affected by a new wave of tension in the area, marked by an assassination attempt on 9 February against the President of the Republic of Georgia, Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze (see A/53/66-S/1998/115), and deteriorating security conditions in the UNOMIG area of operations. The period was also marked by widespread dissatisfaction among refugees and internally displaced persons in Georgia. During a meeting in New York on 6 April with Mrs. Louise Fréchette, Deputy Secretary-General, the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Mr. Zurab Zhvania, indicated that the authorities were being urged to take action to address the situation.

3. On 22 January, the Coordinating Council, established on the basis of the Concluding Statement of the meeting between the Georgian and Abkhaz parties, held in Geneva from 17 to 19 November 1997, held an extraordinary session in Tbilisi under the chairmanship of my Special Representative and with the

participation of representatives of the two sides to the corflict, the Russian Federation, in its capacity as facilitator, OSCE and the group of Friends of the Secretary-General. Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the CIS peacekeeping force, as well as Mr. Zurab Lakerbaia, Secretary of the Georgian/Abkhaz Bilateral Joint Coordination Commission, were also present. The session, which was convened at the request of the Abkhaz side to address the "escalation of diversionary and terrorist activities" in the area, was preceded by meetings of Working Group I, which deals with issues related to the lasting non-resumption of hostilities and to security problems, and of Working Group III, dealing with economic and social problems. The meetings were chaired by their Coordinators, the Chief Military Observer of UNOMIG, Maj.-Gen. Harun-Ar-Rashid, and the Resident Representative of UNDP, Mr. Marco Borsotti, respectively. The Coordinating Council, inter alia, adopted a mandate for the United Nations Needs Assessment Mission to Abkhazia, Georgia (see paras. 18 and 40-43 below), instructed Working Group I to work out a mechanism for investigating and preventing violations of the Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces of 14 May 1994 (see S/1994/583 and Corr.1) and subversive/terrorist acts in the zone of conflict; and requested Working Group II, which deals with refugees and internally displaced persons, to convene in order to discuss implementation of the tasks entrusted to it.

4. On 31 March, the third session of the Coordinating Council, which was attended by the same participants, took place in Sukhumi. The Council requested Working Group I to speed up the elaboration of mechanisms for investigating and preventing violations of the Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces, as well as subversive and terrorist acts in the zone of conflict. On the proposal of the Russian Federation, the Council decided to examine the legalization of the status of the spontaneous returnees in the Gali sector of Abkhazia, Georgia, and to consider some additional humanitarian assistance from the Russian Federation to the inhabitants of the region. The Coordinating Council also decided to convene, in the second half of the year, a special meeting on measures to be taken to promote an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding. The Abkhaz head of delegation insisted on changing, in the Russian language, which is the working language of the Council, the names of geographical locations in Abkhazia, Georgia. The Russian facilitator and the Georgian representatives did not accept this. The Council's next session is scheduled for May 1998 in Tbilisi.

5. There were also bilateral contacts between the two sides. The Secretary of the Bilateral Joint Coordination Commission travelled frequently between Tbilisi and Sukhumi. On 24 February, the State Minister of Georgia, Mr. Niko Lekishvili, accompanied by the Ministers of Energy, Transport and Communications and the Head of the Georgian Oil Corporation, visited Sukhumi and met with the Abkhaz leadership within the framework of the Commission. Both sides expressed their satisfaction with the outcome of the talks. On 27 February, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria visited Sukhumi.

6. During the reporting period, representatives of the Russian Federation met with the two sides to promote progress in the peace process. In the first half

of March, Mr. Lekishvili and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Mr. Irakli Menagarishvili, visited Moscow and participated in sessions of the bodies of CIS, where issues related to the Georgian/Abkhaz conflict were on the agenda. On 17 March, Ambassador-at-Large Lev Mironov of the Russian Federation went to Sukhumi. In March also, the head of the de facto Abkhaz government, Mr. Sergei Bagapsh, and the personal representative of the Abkhaz leader, Mr. Vladislav Ardzinba, to the peace process, Mr. Anri Jergenia, visited Moscow.

7. From 18 to 25 March, an OSCE delegation headed by the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Ambassador Gerard Stoudman, visited Georgia, including the zone of conflict, and met with representatives of the Government of Georgia and the Abkhaz authorities.

8. During the reporting period, representatives of the European Union also maintained contacts with the two sides. From 1 to 3 April, a delegation consisting of the Ambassadors of France, Germany, Greece and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland accredited to Georgia, as well as a representative of the European Union Office in Tbilisi, visited Abkhazia, Georgia, where they met with the Abkhaz leadership.

9. During the period, the Government of Georgia announced that, in accordance with an agreement reached with the Russian authorities, Georgian border guards would be taking over from their Russian counterparts the responsibility of patrolling Georgia's maritime border from 1 July 1998. Since this would include the territorial waters along the coast of Abkhazia, Georgia, the Abkhaz side stated that they would resist any attempt by the Government of Georgia to patrol the waters adjacent to the coastline or to control maritime traffic in those waters.

10. On 14 March, the Abkhaz authorities held "local government elections" throughout Abkhazia, Georgia, with the exception of the Gali sector, despite calls by the international community not to hold such elections as long as the political status of the region remained undecided and refugees and internally displaced persons were not given the option to participate. The legality of the elections was denounced by both the Security Council and OSCE and by the spokesman of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation. The Government and the Parliament of Georgia also protested.

11. In paragraph 9 of my report of 19 January 1998 (S/1998/51), I informed the Council that the Abkhaz "Parliament" had passed a privatization "law", which the Government of Georgia had declared illegal and had warned that its eventual implementation could complicate the process of a peaceful settlement. During the reporting period, the Abkhaz authorities continued their preparations to implement the "law" and set up a property management committee for carrying out a privatization process. In response, on 1 April the Georgian Parliament issued a statement stipulating that any legislation passed by the Abkhaz authorities was null and void and that any civil and legal transaction violating Georgian legislation on property was also invalid. The statement pointed out that a privatization process on the territory of Abkhazia, Georgia, would be possible only after the territorial integrity of Georgia had been restored and refugees as well as internally displaced persons had returned.

12. Between 12 March and 24 April, representatives of some Georgian political parties together with refugees and internally displaced persons, held demonstrations at the main bridge over the Inguri River. The participants voiced a number of demands concerning a settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz conflict, including the prompt repatriation of refugees and internally displaced persons, a major role for "people's diplomacy" and the withdrawal of the CIS peacekeeping force from the zone of conflict. Although the number of participants varied from tens to hundreds or, on some occasions, even thousands, they continually blocked the M-27 road, thus hampering the operations of UNOMIG and of humanitarian organizations (see para. 15 below).

III. HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

13. UNHCR, ICRC, Acción Contra el Hambre (ACH), Médecins sans Frontières (MSF-France) and the United Methodist Committee on Relief are the primary agencies addressing the needs of civilians in Abkhazia, Georgia. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs facilitates coordination in the region. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) continues its vaccination programme, with support from MSF-France.

14. As part of its multisectoral programme, UNHCR provides roof rehabilitation kits to civilians returning to their homes. ACH, with UNHCR support, completed its 1997 school rehabilitation programme at the end of February, rehabilitating a total of 17 schools in the Sukhumi region. ACH has also renovated the hospital in Tkvarcheli, also with UNHCR support. In 1998, UNHCR plans to distribute fertilizer to returnees, internally displaced persons and vulnerable families to improve yields of corn and mandarin oranges. UNHCR maintains its support for a local non-governmental organization, Peace and Accord, to provide emergency assistance to elderly women in Sukhumi. Première Urgence has recently begun an emergency apartment rehabilitation programme for extremely vulnerable elderly people living in Sukhumi. In the Kodori Valley, Counterpart International is addressing emergency needs. The Halo Trust continues its demining activities along the Gumista and Inguri Rivers.

15. As noted above, the blockade of the main bridge over the Inguri (see para. 28 below) has seriously impeded the delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians in need in Abkhazia, Georgia. The protest forced UNHCR to halt all distribution of roof kits to returnees in the Gali region and risked forcing the Office to curtail its fertilizer distribution programme as well. The UNICEF plans to strengthen its immunization programme, provide basic medicines and supplies to hospitals and clinics and supply school kits throughout Abkhazia, Georgia, were put on hold. ACH soup kitchens were forced to reduce daily food rations for 3,000 elderly people, mostly ethnic Russians and Georgians, because the organization's food supplies could not be transported across the bridge. Counterpart International was unable to deliver medical supplies and equipment or school furniture to the Gali region or to Sukhumi. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Adventist Development and Relief Agency International delayed implementation of a health training project and an income-generation project in Sukhumi because the protest was blocking its only route into the region. Likewise, the deadline for a $5 million USAID request for applications for projects in health and education rehabilitation had to be

postponed several times because applicants could not travel safely across the Inguri River to conduct assessments.

16. In view of the deteriorating security situation in the region during the reporting period, including more frequent cases of armed robbery, car-jacking and looting, aid agencies have repeated their concerns to the Government of Georgia and the Abkhaz authorities and have called on them to provide full support to ensure that humanitarian assistance can continue to reach civilians in need.

17. The level of support from the international donor community for humanitarian programmes in Abkhazia, Georgia, does not yet meet the needs of the region, in particular in the areas of return. However, the United States of America is planning to provide $5 million for the rehabilitation of health and educational facilities. It is hoped that donors will come forward with contributions so that current programme levels can be maintained. In February, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in close cooperation with UNHCR and other agencies, organized a visit to the region for the Minister for Development Cooperation of the Netherlands.

18. In the period from 4 February to 4 March, a 23-member needs assessment mission, headed by Mr. Bert Bernander and consisting of representatives of UNDP, UNICEF, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, the World Food Programme, the World Bank, USAID, the Government of the Netherlands and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation, visited Abkhazia, Georgia. The mission, which was accompanied by representatives of the Governments of the Russian Federation and Greece, acted under the aegis of the United Nations, within the mandate of Working Group III of the Coordinating Council. In March, the mission issued its report (see paras. 40-43 below).

19. The Human Rights Office in Sukhumi continued its work on promotion and protection of human rights in Abkhazia, Georgia. Cooperation with OSCE within the framework of the Human Rights Office is fruitful. On 13 February, the Office issued a press release expressing concern regarding the restrictions on education in the Georgian language in schools of the Gali district. The Head of the Office, Ms. Elisabeth Stam, relinquished her post at the end of February 1998 after completing one year of service. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is making arrangements to send a replacement. An additional Junior Human Rights Officer is also being recruited.

IV. OPERATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER MISSION IN GEORGIA

20. UNOMIG continues to be headed by my Special Representative, Mr. Liviu Bota (Romania). In the context of my efforts to strengthen the Mission's political element (see S/1997/340, para. 39), I have now appointed Ms. Heidi Tagliavini (Switzerland) Deputy Head of UNOMIG. Ms. Tagliavini, who assumed her duties on 24 March, is stationed in Sukhumi and travels as necessary to Tbilisi.

21. Since I last reported to the Security Council and until the 19 February hostage-taking incident (see para. 24 below), UNOMIG continued to operate in the

security and restricted weapons zones of the Zugdidi and Gali sectors and in the Kodori Valley and was able to implement its mandated tasks effectively. However, in the wake of the above-mentioned incident, the Mission's modus operandi, which had already been temporarily revised in September 1997 following another hostage-taking incident (see S/1997/827, para. 13), was again revised radically. All operational patrolling has now been suspended and patrols are conducted for administrative and escort purposes only along the main road crossing the sectors. While such patrols continue to be conducted in two vehicles at all times, they are now escorted by mine-protected vehicles when within the security and restricted weapons zones. The Mission's team bases in both sectors have also been relocated to the sector headquarters in Zugdidi and Gali town, where the observers meet daily with representatives of the CIS peacekeeping force and local authorities to discuss security matters. As a result of these new limitations to its modus operandi, UNOMIG now finds itself, for all practical purposes, unable to implement its mandated tasks effectively.

22. Since consultations on improving the security of UNOMIG and on a possible new concept of operations for the Mission are still ongoing (see para. 27 below), it has been decided that, except in a few cases, the regular rotation of military observers should be suspended for the time being. As a result, the Mission's strength now stands at 91 observers (see annex).

23. Council members will recall that, at the time of my report of 19 January 1998, arrangements were under way to provide UNOMIG with helicopter support for medical evacuation and operational purposes (see S/1998/51, para. 18). The helicopter arrived in the mission area on 31 March. However, administrative difficulties with the Georgian and Russian authorities are still preventing the Mission from using the aircraft, which remains at Adler Airport in Sochi. Consultations are continuing with the relevant authorities in order to ensure its speedy deployment, which is essential to the Mission's security.

24. During the reporting period, the Mission's personnel and property continued to be subjected to acts of violence by criminal groups. One such incident took place on 24 January, when several armed men broke into the living quarters of military observers in Gali town, beat up a newly arrived observer and burglarized the house. Another particularly serious incident took place in the early morning of 19 February, when a group of 15 to 20 armed men forcibly entered the UNOMIG sector headquarters in Zugdidi. After firing at the tyres of the Mission's vehicles, the group took four observers hostage and fled in one of the Mission's vehicles. A few hours later, at the request of the hostage-takers, the captured military observers conveyed by telephone several demands to their respective capitals. These demands included (a) the holding of talks between the so-called "legitimate Government of Georgia" and the present Government; (b) the withdrawal of all Russian troops from Georgia; and (c) the release of political prisoners in Georgia. Following negotiations between the Georgian authorities and the hostage-takers, three of the captured observers were released between 22 and 25 February. The fourth managed to escape and was later found safe by the Mission.

25. It will be recalled that UNOMIG had already taken several steps to deal with the threat posed by criminal and related groups in the region. In addition to a revision of the Mission's modus operandi, arrangements have been made with

the CIS peacekeeping force under which the force is called whenever there is a threat against the Mission's patrols or living quarters. Furthermore, military observers' quarters in Gali and Zugdidi have been concentrated into clusters of designated houses, which have been tested for safety, thus providing better security. Random night patrols are conducted by the Mission around these groups of houses. Forces of the Georgian Ministry of the Interior now guard the Zugdidi sector headquarters on a 24-hour basis and locally contracted guards are deployed at each of the Mission's facilities in Gali, Sukhumi and Pitsunda. Finally, in addition to the helicopter support, arrangements are also under way to provide the Mission with ballistic-protective vehicles.

26. On 19 February, the day of the hostage-taking incident, a United Nations security assessment team began a visit to the mission area to evaluate the security measures already taken and to consider whether additional ones might be required. In view of subsequent developments and based on the team's assessment, it appears that a possible solution would be to provide the Mission with a self-protection unit, along with the necessary civilian support personnel, whose task would be to guard each of the Mission's facilities, except Tbilisi. Medical support to the unit would be provided by civilian personnel. As envisaged at present, a 294-strong unit would be deployed around the clock in three shifts of 11 officers to protect the four team bases in the Gali and Zugdidi sectors, the two sector headquarters and the main headquarters in Sukhumi. An additional 16 officers would constitute the command structure and a further 47 would ensure logistic support. This unit would not undertake any patrolling. The military observers would thus continue to patrol unescorted, although they would only be authorized to do so in ballistic- or mine-protected vehicles. In exceptional circumstances, however, the unit could provide assistance to the Mission's patrols if deemed necessary by the Chief Military Observer. Within the Mission's operational capability, the unit would also provide protection to other United Nations agencies when so requested. Clearly, the deployment of such a protection unit would not relieve the parties of their responsibility to provide the Mission with adequate security, nor would the assistance currently provided by the CIS peacekeeping force cease to be required.

27. My Special Representative has shared this proposal with the Government of Georgia, which has welcomed it and expressed its readiness to assist the Mission as necessary. The Abkhaz authorities, however, although they did not object to the proposal when it was first explained to them, have now expressed reservations. My Special Representative continues, therefore, to hold consultations with all concerned, including the group of Friends of the Secretary-General, in order to ensure that an agreement can be reached on modalities for protection, which would allow UNOMIG to resume its mandated activities.

28. In addition to its negative effects on the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the region, the blockade of the main bridge over the Inguri River also seriously affected the operations of UNOMIG and of the CIS peacekeeping force, whom the demonstrators prevented from crossing the bridge by vehicle. Between 5 and 8 April, they also closed the bridge to pedestrians, except for local civilian use. Given that the blockade constituted a serious obstacle to the freedom of movement of UNOMIG and had operational and administrative

repercussions for the Mission, my Special Representative and the Chief Military Observer of UNOMIG conveyed strong protests to the Georgian authorities at various levels. The demonstrators have now agreed to lift restrictions on crossings, except for the CIS peacekeeping force.

29. The weekly quadripartite meetings chaired by the Commander of the CIS peacekeeping force have continued during the period under review. It will be recalled that the meetings bring together the Chief Military Observer and representatives of the Georgian and Abkhaz police, militia, security services and local administration to discuss security and other issues affecting both sides at the local level. Neither the Georgian administration nor police were present at any of the meetings, except on 15 April when the Deputy Mayor of Zugdidi attended. The only representative from the Georgian side was its Zugdidi Chief Military Observer, whose attendance was sporadic. Nonetheless, the meetings continue to be a useful forum in which to consider local issues.

30. UNOMIG continues to cooperate with United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations working in Abkhazia, Georgia. It regularly shares information with them and provides them with escorts when this is requested and operationally feasible.

V. COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER MISSION IN GEORGIA AND THE COLLECTIVE PEACEKEEPING FORCES OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

31. To the best of its ability in the present circumstances, UNOMIG continues to observe the operations of the CIS peacekeeping forces within the framework of the implementation of the 14 May 1994 Agreement. Cooperation on the ground between UNOMIG and the force remains good. Frequent and regular meetings are held to discuss matters affecting their respective activities and to agree on mutual assistance. The CIS peacekeeping force provided UNOMIG with valuable support during the 19 February hostage-taking incident and in connection with the blockade of the main bridge of the Inguri River.

32. The Council of Heads of State of the CIS held a meeting in Moscow on 29 April and decided, inter alia, to extend, with the consent of the parties, the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping force until 31 July 1998; to demand urgently that the organized return of refugees and displaced persons should begin and that their return to the Gali district (within its old borders) should be completed by the end of 1998 on the basis of the mechanisms worked out by representatives of the parties, the Russian Federation and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; to recommend urgently that the parties to the conflict should consider and resolve the question of the establishment, at the stage of the return of refugees and the full normalization of life in the Gali district (within its old borders), of a temporary transitional administration, which would work with the direct participation of the intermediaries, the United Nations and OSCE. The Heads of State also decided that, within one month, on the basis of a mechanism worked out by the parties to the conflict, a plan should be drawn up for the redeployment of the CIS peacekeeping force; and, in the event of opposition to the return of refugees and the emergence of a threat to peace and security in the region, to

consider the question of introducing appropriate changes in the nature and content of the peacekeeping operation on the basis of the appropriate provisions of the Charter of the United Nations applicable in such cases. The decision taken by the Heads of State has been issued as document S/1998/372, annex. The Abkhaz leadership expressed its support for the extension of the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping force, but was critical of other decisions taken at the meeting.

VI. SITUATION ON THE GROUND

A. General

33. The situation in the security and restricted weapons zones of the Zugdidi and Gali sectors has been difficult to assess accurately since the suspension of patrolling. Based on information received from the CIS peacekeeping force and from local authorities, UNOMIG reported that tension escalated in the period leading up to and following the Abkhaz "local elections" in mid-March. In addition, in the aftermath of the assassination attempt on President Shevardnadze on 9 February, the security situation in the Zugdidi area has become more unstable. While day-to-day life appears to continue normally in that area, there is an increase in tension, shown by the reinforcement of Ministry of the Interior troops in that sector.

34. Activities by criminal groups against the local population and personnel of international organizations, including UNOMIG, continued during the period under review, albeit to a lesser extent than previously. However, local authorities on both sides of the Inguri River were still not able to address the problem effectively.

35. Mine-laying and other armed activities by certain groups, who appear to be politically motivated and to target mostly the Abkhaz authorities and the CIS peacekeeping force, also continued during the reporting period, killing 2 Abkhaz officers and 4 civilians and injuring 10 soldiers from the CIS peacekeeping force, 10 Abkhaz officers and 4 civilians.

B. Security and restricted weapons zones

36. Both sides continue to violate the 14 May 1994 Agreement. During the period covered by the present report, UNOMIG reported 14 violations by the Government of Georgia and 8 by the Abkhaz side. Those violations involved incursions by individual unarmed servicemen into the security zone. However, several more substantive violations were observed when both sides brought armoured vehicles into the security and restricted weapons zones on a number of occasions. While most of the vehicles were eventually withdrawn, one of them, which was deployed by the Georgian Ministry of the Interior at the Zugdidi police station, has not been withdrawn. On 20 March, four additional armoured vehicles were brought into the Zugdidi sector and remained there until 24 April, in spite of repeated protests by UNOMIG.

37. Since the cessation of its operational patrolling, UNOMIG has not been able to report on long-standing violations of the Moscow Agreement mentioned in previous reports.

C. Kodori Valley

38. As a result of difficult road conditions during the winter season and the subsequent suspension of the Mission's patrolling, UNOMIG has not been able to assess fully the situation in the Kodori Valley. In early February, when the valley was again accessible, the situation appeared to be calm. The CIS peacekeeping force, which has withdrawn its easternmost checkpoint but continues to be present in the valley, has not reported any violations of the 14 May 1994 Agreement.

VII. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS

39. In the economic sphere, little has changed in Georgia during the reporting period. The Government is advancing the process of economic reform and its efforts are producing positive results, as shown by the rates of economic growth in the country, continued control of inflation and stability of the national currency in relation to the United States dollar. In the energy sector in particular, the Government is taking positive steps that in the long term are expected to reduce the detrimental effects of economic transformation. Negotiations with the International Monetary Fund, however, have continued for longer than expected and are now likely to be concluded in May. This will have repercussions on the disbursement of loans from the European Commission and the World Bank.

40. Under the auspices of the Coordinating Council, the process of extending economic recovery into Abkhazia, Georgia, is being examined in conformity with Security Council resolutions. In accordance with the agreements reached by the Coordinating Council at its session held in Tbilisi on 22 January 1998, the UNDP Resident Representative, acting in his capacity as Coordinator of Working Group III on social and economic reconstruction, organized a United Nations needs assessment mission to Abkhazia, Georgia. The mission was entrusted by the Coordinating Council with the task of assessing and identifying short- and medium-term needs in the economic and social sphere. The mission conducted its activities between 14 February and 4 March (see para. 18 above).

41. A general feature of the mission's findings is the dire state of the physical infrastructure in all sectors, much of which continues to deteriorate. Within that context, humanitarian aid continues to be important, although, with the conflict crisis over, assistance is shifting gradually from life-saving, emergency relief to types of activity that include basic rehabilitation of important structures such as schools and health clinics.

42. The report notes, however, that attempts at rehabilitation will be affected by several constraints. The loss of more than half the 1989 population, for example, has had a devastating impact on the region's social and economic resilience. Closely related to that constraint is the present demographic

uncertainty and the lack of a timetable for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to the area.

43. In view of these considerations, the needs assessment mission proposed a two-pronged approach, combining elements of both sectoral and area-based programmes. The sectoral approach will be necessary in major infrastructure improvements, such as road building or the vaccination of livestock. The area-based approach seeks to revitalize communities rather than sectors. Implementation assumes that the relevant Security Council resolutions are respected by all parties.

VIII. OBSERVATIONS

44. The groundwork laid in the past few months should have permitted faster progress in the peace process. Regrettably, a number of developments such as the holding of "local elections" in Abkhazia, Georgia, implementation of a "privatization law" and proposed toponymic changes there, as well as recent problems in the normal functioning of the working groups of the Coordinating Council slowed down the momentum. Also, difficulties encountered on Georgian controlled territory relating to the normal operation of UNOMIG or the provision of humanitarian and other assistance to Abkhazia, Georgia, have been a hindrance. The long blockade of the Inguri main bridge is an example. I am inviting the parties to the conflict to abstain from any action that might undermine efforts under way, to do their utmost in support of the peace process and to display the necessary political will so that concrete results may be attained on the central issues - the return of refugees and the political status of Abkhazia, Georgia.

45. The right of the refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes in the region is imprescriptible. The arguments of those who want to prevent their return and thereby prolong the hardship and suffering they have had to endure cannot be accepted. At the same time, however, violence should not be used as a means of pursuing a settlement of the refugee issue. Political dialogue, increased humanitarian aid and development assistance to the region provide peaceful avenues to facilitate their return.

46. My Special Representative has scheduled another high-level meeting at Geneva in May 1998. The meeting will offer the parties a further opportunity to achieve progress. For that to be the case, however, both sides should demonstrate their commitment to the settlement of the conflict through genuine negotiations and mutual accommodation.

47. I am grateful to the Government of Georgia for its assistance during and following the 19 February hostage-taking incident and to President Shevardnadze, under whose able guidance the crisis was peacefully resolved. I believe, however, that there is much to be done by both sides, and in particular by the Government of Georgia, to improve the security situation in the UNOMIG area of operation. Indeed, there are indications that most of the attacks on the Abkhaz militia and the CIS peacekeeping force, which have repercussions on the activities of UNOMIG, have been orchestrated by armed groups operating from the Georgian side of the Inguri River. Furthermore, the two hostage-taking

incidents of 16 September 1997 and 19 February 1998 took place on Georgian-controlled territory.

48. I am concerned about the personal safety of unarmed United Nations military observers being asked to operate in conditions of high insecurity, as is currently the case in the region. This view is shared by the Governments of countries contributing military observers to the Mission, which have expressed their serious concern in this regard and requested that appropriate measures be taken to correct the situation. Should the Security Council agree with the concept of a self-protection unit described in paragraph 26 above, the troops for which should, for practical reasons, be contributed by one single country, my Special Representative would consult on it with the Abkhaz authorities, in close consultation with the group of Friends of the Secretary-General, bearing in mind that the agreement of both parties would be a condition sine qua non for the deployment of such a unit. I shall submit as soon as possible, in an addendum to the present report, a statement on the related financial implications.

49. Should the Security Council prefer a different approach, the following three options would remain: (a) reduce UNOMIG to the minimal possible presence, pending a significant improvement in the security situation; (b) redeploy UNOMIG at its authorized strength and resume previous operations using mine- and ballistic-protected vehicles; and (c) strengthen security arrangements with the CIS peacekeeping force. While the first option would avoid placing the lives of the observers at risk, it would result in a situation where the Mission would be unable to implement its mandate, which could have significant repercussions on the peace process. The second option would continue to expose the observers to real and serious danger. As regards the third option, and notwithstanding the fact that the CIS peacekeeping force has provided the Mission with valuable security support on several occasions, the role and nature of UNOMIG require that it be seen as fully independent. Moreover, the CIS peacekeeping force has itself unfortunately sustained some 200 casualties, including 57 killed, during the past four years as a result of what appears to be politically motivated actions by armed groups. Under these circumstances, the establishment of closer links might have negative implications for the security of UNOMIG personnel.

50. I wish to take this opportunity to thank my Special Representative, Mr. Liviu Bota, and all the civilian and military personnel of UNOMIG for their dedication and perseverance in carrying out, under difficult and at times dangerous conditions, the tasks entrusted to them by the Security Council.

Annex

Composition of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia as at 30 April 1998

Country	Military observers
Albania	1
Austria	4
Bangladesh	8
Czech Republic	4
Denmark	5
Egypt	4
France	-
Germany	11
Greece	4
Hungary	5
Indonesia	4
Jordan	5
Pakistan	5
Poland	4
Republic of Korea	4
Russian Federation	3
Sweden	4
Switzerland	5
Turkey	4
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1
United States of America	2
Uruguay	4
Total	91

وزع بعثة مراقبي الأمم المتحدة في جورجيا
联格观察团部署情形
UNOMIG DEPLOYMENT
DÉPLOIEMENT DE LA MONUG
РАЗВЕРТЫВАНИЕ МООННГ
DESPLIEGUE DE LA UNOMIG
RUSSIAN FEDERATION
Karachayevsk
Gantiadi
Gagra
Pskhu
ADMIN
Pitsunda
Gudauta
Novyy Afon
Sukhumi
Gulripsh
Dranda
Amtkel
Kvemo Azhara
Omarishara
Mestia
Lata
Otap
Dzgerda
Tqvarcheli
Khaishi
Lentekhi
Okumi
Ochamchira
Gali
Zemo-Bargevi
Nabakevi
Zugdidi
Kahati
Pichori
Anaklia
Khobi
Senaki
Poti
Samtredia
Tskhaltubo
Kutaisi
Chiatura
Kurta
Tskhinvali
Akhalgori
Dushet'i
Tqibuli
Ambrolauri
Khvanchkara
Kvaisi
Mleta
Passanauri
Zestaponi
Khashuri
Gori
Mtskheta
LO
Tbilisi
Borjomi
Abastumani
Atskuri
Akhaltsikhe
Vale
Marneuli
Supsa
Chokhatauri
Ozurgeti
Bakhmaro
Kobuleti
Batumi
AJARIA
Khulo
Keda
TURKEY
BLACK SEA
M UNOMIG main HQ
ADMIN Administrative HQ
S Sector HQ
LO Liaison office
Team base
Security zone (SZ)
Restricted weapons zone (RWZ)
0 25 50 75 km
0 25 50 mi
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
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Cartographic Section
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